

Ex situ ohranjanje vrste *Degenia velebitica* (Dègen) Hayek z licenciranim gojenjem in prodajo sadik

***Ex situ* conservation of *Degenia velebitica* (Dègen) Hayek through licensed cultivation and sale**

VANJA STAMENKOVIĆ

Botanical Garden of the Faculty of Science, Zagreb University, Trg Marka Marulića
9a, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia; vstamen@botanic.hr

Degenia velebitica, generally recognized as a symbol of Croatian mountains as well as rich Croatian endemic flora, grows wild in several spots along the Kapela and Velebit mountains. It enjoys statutory protection since 1964, and wild populations are directly protected within the Velebit National park and Park of nature borders. Nevertheless, *Degenia* is an endangered plant species, suffering from unlawful collecting of specimens or seeds, but mostly as a result of degradation of its natural habitat; rockeries, scree and crevices are being colonized and covered by 'aggressive' plants, such as *Sesleria juncifolia*, which 'smother' delicate *Degenia* populations and stop their development.

Permanent populations of *Degenia* are being cultivated in the Botanical garden of the Faculty of Science (Zagreb University) for the last half of century, and two test flower beds were arranged 10 years ago following the 'tip' from colleges at the Botanical garden of the Ljubljana University, using ordinary garden soil and plenty of calcareous gravel. Fully developed populations blossomed plentifully, providing with a large number of viable seeds that was being used in further experiments and cultivation. Data collected over the years was used to successfully cultivate single pot specimens. Special Licence had to be obtained from the national Nature protection agency before the start of the cultivation programme, and only 10% of the permitted number of specimens was grown, in order to investigate the purchase interest. Most of the specimens were sold to selected Elementary schools from all Croatian provinces at the *Degenia* Exhibition opening ceremony, and the rest was available to the public. Funds obtained from the sales will be invested in the further developing of this *Ex situ* programme, with some other endemic plants such as *Centaurea ragusina* and *Campanula tommasiniana* to follow.